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The Herald

SOAPBOX

MIAMI-DADE DRUG TREATMENT IS A SOUND COURSE

In response to an opinion piece by this Finn Kavanagh *Restore funds for drug treatment*, Dec. 8], I would like to comment on Kavanagh's observation that "Treatment is not just a cost, but a wise investment."

According to the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), every American man, woman, and child pays over \$1,000 annually to cover the \$275 billion tab for untreated addiction. Costs incurred from untreated substance abuse are from lost productivity, law enforcement, healthcare, etc. Ironically, it would only cost each American about \$45 to provide full treatment for all addictive disorders.

Studies in 15 states conducted by the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD) found decreases in hospitalizations resulting from addiction treatment. Healthcare costs were 87 percent less by the third year of treatment.

Additionally, a Harvard University study found that substance abuse interventions ranked among the top 10 percent of over 500 cost saving and life saving medical treatments. According to the Physician Leadership on National Drug Policy, behavioral and medication compliance among recovering addicts is comparable to patients being treated for diabetes, hypertension, or asthma. In fact, the relapse rate is actually lower for drug addiction treatment.

Moreover, a National Institute of Justice study found that inmates receiving addiction treatment in prison and during work release programs were 75 percent drug free and

70 percent arrest free after 18 months. Of those not treated, 80 percent relapsed and 67 percent were arrested again. A Rand Corporation study determined that providing treatment to all addicts in the United States could save more than \$150 billion in social costs over the next 15 years, while requiring only \$21 billion in treatment expenditures.

Results prove that addiction treatment is not only beneficial to the individual but to society in general. With proper treatment intervention, even the relapse rate is lower in the treatment of addiction than other maladies. Therefore, the cost of substance abuse to society goes beyond the treatment costs and includes other effects, such as crime, drug enforcement costs, and other health costs.

Can drug addicts who have been in legal trouble find help in rehab rather than jail? And will treatment really keep addicts off drugs? The federal government spends about two-thirds of its \$19.2 billion drug budget on law enforcement and interdiction — with at least 60 percent of inmates reporting a history of substance abuse. The cost of warehousing nonviolent drug offenders is more than twice as great as treating them.

Furthermore, a two-year California Drug and Alcohol Treatment Assessment (CALDATA) study found that for every \$1 spent on treatment, \$7 was saved in future costs. The questions raised above can be answered with a resounding "Yes," drug treatment is a wise investment — one life and one dollar at a time.

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